

Knowledge Transfer Processes in the IS Offshore Outsourcing Transition: A Conceptual Model

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Abstract

Despite promising cost saving potential, many offshore software projects fail to realize the expected benefits. A frequent source of failure lies in the insufficient transfer of knowledge during the transition phase. Former literature has reported cases where some domains of knowledge were successfully transferred to vendor personnel whereas others were not. There is further evidence that the actual knowledge transfer processes often vary from case to case. This raises the question whether there is a systematic relationship between the chosen knowledge transfer process and knowledge transfer success. This paper introduces a dynamic perspective that distinguishes different types of knowledge transfer processes explaining under which circumstances which type is deemed most appropriate to successfully transfer knowledge. Our paper draws on knowledge transfer literature, the Model of Work-Based Learning and theories from cognitive psychology to show how characteristics of knowledge and the absorptive capacity of knowledge recipients fit particular knowledge transfer processes. The knowledge transfer processes are conceptualized as combinations of generic knowledge transfer activities. This results in six gestalts of knowledge transfer processes, each representing a fit between the characteristics of the knowledge process and the characteristics of the knowledge to be transferred and the absorptive capacity of the knowledge recipient.

Keywords: Knowledge Transfer, Offshore Outsourcing, Transition Phase, Work-Based Learning, Cognitive Load Theory

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